

VZCZCXRO7129
PP RUEHAG RUEHAST RUEHBI RUEHCI RUEHDF RUEHIK RUEHLH RUEHLN RUEHLZ
RUEHPW RUEHROV RUEHVK RUEHYG
DE RUEHAH #1370 2901309
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 161309Z OCT 08
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1720
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 4410
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 2222
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2087
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 2658
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 2979

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 001370

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [ECON](#) [EINV](#) [SOCI](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN BUILDS AN OLYMPIC VILLAGE COMPLEX

11. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for public Internet.

12. (SBU) President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov loves sports. The pictures you see in the official press and the posters hung in the two Ashgabat stadiums show an active man, who loves to ride his bike along mountain roads. They also show an aficionado of martial arts, who, just recently, was awarded the sixth-level black belt in karate. Every school opening has children demonstrating all kinds of sports. The send-off for the country's 10 Olympic athletes was a grand affair, replete with performances by pop stars and a parade of local athletes. Given his love for sports, the president was very disappointed that Turkmenistan's team was the only Central Asian Olympic team to not win any medals in the Beijing games. His anger was presaged because prior to the team's departure for China, the president publicly criticized the head of the State Tourism and Sports Committee for not preparing the athletes properly.

13. (SBU) Since returning from the Olympics in Beijing, Berdimuhamedov has set a great goal for his country that hopefully will lead to Olympic glory. He decided to construct 200 sports schools all over Turkmenistan with places for 75,000 students and to construct an Olympic complex to prepare for the country's eventual hosting of an international sports event. On October 14, Berdimuhamedov inaugurated this dream at a formal ceremony attended by government leadership, the diplomatic corps, businessmen hoping to serve as sub-contractors on this project, a visiting group from the Chinese Communist Party, and thousands of screaming, cheering students. Berdimuhamedov told the group of diplomats that Turkmenistan hoped to bid to host a future Asian Games.

14. (SBU) Construction will start on the Olympic complex in 2009, and it should be completed by 2015. The Turkish company Polimeks will build the complex in the southern part of Ashgabat. The complex will include a reconstructed Olympic stadium with seating for 60,000; a 10,000-seat ice hockey arena; a sports hockey boarding school; a para-olympic center; a 5,000-seat natatorium; an outdoor swimming pool with seating for 3,000; a 3,000-seat covered tennis court; cycle track with stands for an audience of 3,000; a 3,000-seat area for wrestling, boxing, weightlifting, and

fencing; a 10,000-seat area for gymnastics; 11-12 training halls; medical and rehabilitation center; 500-bed hotel; 800-bed hotel with press center; business center; shopping mall/trade pavilion; 1,000-seat restaurant; residential buildings for 12,000; and cultural and social centers.

15. (SBU) At the ceremony, we spoke with an American architect, who works for the British architectural firm HOK International Ltd. He was there, along with about 30 hopeful sub-contractors, because his firm wants to get a contract for planning and landscaping for the Olympic complex as well as for phases II and III of the Avaza tourist zone on the Caspian. He said that the event and his visit had been delayed for a week due to the president's schedule. Originally, Polimeks had arranged to bring U.S. Olympic champion Carl Lewis to the ceremony, but the change in dates made that impossible.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The Turkmen no doubt are hoping that if they build this complex, the Olympics or Asian Games will come. We are less sanguine. We also doubt that the Turkmen will host an international event with ice hockey. One Turkmen official remarked to us that this complex will put Sochi to shame, which may be one reason the Turkmen are building it. END COMMENT.
CURRAN